

2026 State of the Church Address

I have had some extra time the past couple weeks with the holidays and a little break from school. I purposed myself to tackle a few projects around the church but mainly to have prayer and thinking time to see what the Lord would have for us in 2026. I love that I began serving the Lord on a church staff in the year 2000. Its 2026 so I am entering my 26th year serving the Lord in His church. I thought back to my first year as a youth pastor and I remember the senior pastor wanting to take me on a trip to get to know each other and enjoy a conference on the east coast. One of the dinners we had he asked me what my vision was for the youth group. I was a young and passionate new youth pastor so I said, "I want to see the youth grow so big that we would fill up the whole sanctuary." The sanctuary was roughly 500 seats. I thought that was an impressive reply, but the pastor was not impressed. His response was a question. He said, "why." I had no answer. I was conditioned that a big church or large ministry was a successful ministry. As the decades have gone by, I believe that a successful church is a church that is in alignment with the will of God. Today, if someone were to ask me, "what do you want to see the church become?" I would say this: I want the church to be a place that hosts and honors the presence of God.

I really hope you had your coffee this morning. As you can see from the sermon notes, I have a lot of content today. This is not going to be an entertaining sermon that will make you laugh, cry, and give you dynamic revelation. It will be a sermon that will give you perspective as to where we are going as a minister and an outline of what I believe the will of God is for the church today. So, we are going to begin with a really quick review about our mission and vision:

Church Mission:

South Gate Fellowship is a Presence-Driven and Spirit-Filled community of faith that lives to minister to Lord, care for one another, and advance His Kingdom on earth as it is in Heaven.

The church mission is a purpose statement. It describes why South Gate exists. I believe that we exist first to be presence driven. The number one thing we are going after as a spiritual family is God's presence. This means doing everything possible to encounter God. Second, we are a Spirit-filled community of faith. That means we believe the miracles in the Bible can still happen today. We honor the ministry of the Holy Spirit and understand His role in our lives and ministry. We are a community that cares for one another. We serve each other, help each other with both time and money, and we pray for each other. Finally, we are a church that has a command from God to make disciples. God's Kingdom wants to invade this earth until the earth looks just like heaven. This means we will partner with God in outreach, evangelism, and disciple making. That is our mission. Now, the vision of the church is the means in which we will accomplish the mission. It is also a very concise statement so that you remember it easier.

Church Vision:

Encountering and Expressing the Presence of God.

I have seen a lot of churches with this cool vision statement: "To know God and make Him known." I like that vision, but I like to go a step further by saying we encounter God's presence

and then we express His presence. We are called to be Christlike. Well, Jesus preached, healed the sick, cast out devils, served other and more. Finally, the Scripture the Lord has given our church is this:

Church Scripture:

“Enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name.” – Psalm 100:4 NASB1995

Entering God’s gates and courts speaks about the house of God in the Old Testament where the literal presence of God dwells. You enter God’s presence with thanksgiving and praise. But the reason I love this verse so much is because of what it says at the end. We are to *bless* His name. In the Old Testament, the Levites whole lives were dedicated to ministering to the Lord day and night. The priests in the Old Testament served the Lord in many different ways. They didn’t go to war, they didn’t have day jobs, their whole lives were to bless God. In 1 Peter 2:9 it says that Christians are a royal priesthood called to declare the praises of Him who called us out.”

As you know, almost every Sunday I say the phrase “the house of God.” This past week in my time of study I came across a video where someone was very upset that the New Testament church today uses the phrase “House of God.” Their thesis was that using the house of God today is unbiblical. The New Testament church and the Old Testament house of God were two different things with two different covenants. I agree. However, not everything in the Old Testament is bad. The 10 Commandments are in the Old Testament, does that mean we should not follow them? Here is another example: You are not obligated to eat the Old Testament diet. You are free to be unkosher. But if you stopped eating pork and you ate only the foods mentioned in the Bible, I bet you would be a whole lot healthier. I bet you would feel better physically and mentally. I bet you would avoid a lot of sickness and disease. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:23, “All things are permissible, but not all things are beneficial.” So, I wanted to give you a little overview of the house of God from cover to cover of the Bible. I believe God’s desire has always been and will always be to dwell with His people in a way that He is honored and worshipped.

House of God in Scripture:

I shared this with our prayer service this past Wednesday. As I was reviewing the Scripture and resources on the house of God, I came across this quote from the Topical Encyclopedia of the Bible:

The term “House of God” is a significant concept in the Bible, representing a place where God’s presence dwells and where His people gather to worship Him.” – Topical Encyclopedia

#1 – Bethel – Genesis 28:17-19

In Genesis 28 Jacob is traveling as he is running away from his brother after he had sinned against him. One night Jacob lays down for sleep and has a vision of a staircase from heaven. He woke up the next morning and said, “Surely this is the house of God the gate of heaven and I was unaware.” What an awesome and dangerous statement. It is awesome because Jacob discovered

the presence of God, but it is dangerous because he was unaware of it. This is the first mention of the house of God in the Bible and it predates the tabernacle or temple.

#2 – The Tabernacle – Exodus 25-27

When the Israelites were in the wilderness in route to the Promised Land God gave instructions to create a mobile house of God in which the Ark of the Covenant could dwell. It was something that could be set up and taken down as they traveled. The tabernacle was a place of worship, sacrifice, and more. All of it was centered around the presence.

#3 – The Temple of Jerusalem – 1 Kings 6-8

Later in the Old Testament King David saw the need to build God a permanent house. His son Solomon eventually built the Temple and it was a grand and permanent house of God.

#4 – The Tent of David – Psalm 122

You can find the account of the tent of David in 1 Chronicles 15. The tent of David was fascinating on so many levels. First, David noticed the Ark of the Covenant was captured and not in the Temple. David desired to bring the Ark home where it belonged. David set up a tent to house the Ark of the Covenant and then paid full time worshippers to minister to the Lord and worship twenty-four hours a day. Here's the shocking part...you could enter the presence of God in the tent of David without dying. Remember in the Old Testament when the high priest would enter the presence of God on the day of atonement, if he has any sin in him, he would die in the presence of God instantly. But in David's tent this didn't happen. Why? I believe it is a foreshadowing of the boldness we would have to enter the presence of God as New Testament saints. The second shocking thing is that while the presence of God was in the tent of David the regular Temple worship and traditions kept going on! How could you bring sacrifices to God and worship Him when He wasn't even there? It is a sobering reminder to churches today that in all we do as a church, it must be centered around the presence.

#5 – Jesus – John 2:19-21

Now in the New Testament, Jesus said “destroy this temple and I will raise it up in three days.” Of course, He was talking about His body being killed and resurrecting after three days. Jesus called Himself the house of God and rightly so. Jesus was the physical representation of the Father on earth.

#6 – The Church – 1 Timothy 3:15

In 1 Timothy 3:15 Paul says, “you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in the house of God which is the church of the living God....” Paul calls the church (which is not a building but a people) the house of God. Because we are gathering together under this roof, it is the house of God. If we took our service outside, outside would be the house of God. Finally, point number 7:

#7 – Christians – 1 Corinthians 6:19

1 Corinthians 6 says that our physical bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit. So, throughout the whole Bible there was everything from a physical building called the house of God, to every Christian being the house of God. In all these ways the main thing is that the house of God is a place where God's presence dwells and He is worship. That's why I believe the purpose of the church today is to host and honor the presence of God.

Ok, do we need a coffee break? We are almost there. What I want to do now is quickly share with you the marks of what the house of God in the Old Testament were as well as the marks of the New Testament church and how we at South Gate can operate in several of these things.

Marks of the House of God:

#1 – A place to Worship and Minister to the Lord.

“Come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.” – Psalm 95:6

“At that time the Lord set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord to serve Him and to bless in His name until this day.” – Deuteronomy 10:8

You will never see in the Old Testament, “let's go to the Temple and discover how to live our best life now.” No, it was always, “let's go to the house of God to worship Him and give Him a sacrifice. You did not go to the house of God in the Old Testament as a consumer. You went as a contributor. I believe we need to have the same attitude today for the church.

#2 – A place to bring an Offering to the Lord.

When I say offering, I mean more than money. Hebrews 13:15 says that we can continually offer God a sacrifice of praise. You can give God an offering of your time, treasures, and talents. Whenever I am blessed to officiate a funeral, I typically open by thanking those who are in attendance and say something like, “That you for being here today, your presence speaks of your live for so and so.” The people in attendance had to take time off work, travel, spend money, dress nice. All of it is a sacrifice for the remembered. Now I am not saying church is like a funeral, but in the same way we need to bring an offering to God with our time, treasures, and talents. King David said this in 2 Samuel 24 when offered a free plot of land to worship:

“However, the king said to Araunah, “No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price, for I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing.” – 2 Samuel 24:24

#3 – A place to declare the Word of the Lord.

Before the invention of the printing press in the 1500's the Bible was always read in public or in community. I wish we did more of this. The public reading of the Scripture is powerful and is first seen in Nehemiah 8:

“Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. 3 He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. 4 Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose.” – Nehemiah 8:2-4

Marks of the Church:

We are so blessed that chapter two of Acts gives us an incredibly concise and potent description of the church. There are six different elements we see in the birth of the church. Let’s read them in Acts 2 beginning in verse 42:

42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. 44 And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; 45 and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. 46 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.
– Acts 2:42-47

#1 – Devoted to the study of Scripture.

Psalm 1:3 says to meditate on the Word of God day and night. In the church we will keep the Word of God the center of our gatherings. Whether it is Sunday morning, Midweek Service, small groups, they will be centered around the Word. The Word of God, the Bible, is the surest way to the voice of God.

#2 – Devoted to Fellowship.

Fellowship in the Bible is not a small group that gets together to complain and gossip through prayer requests. Did I just say that? Biblical fellowship comes from the Greek word Koinonia and means “sharing, partnership, and communion.” We have vertical fellowship with God and horizontal fellowship with people. Church fellowship is a place of worship, prayer, confession, building one another up.

#3 – Devoted to Communion.

The idea of communion is consistently putting before you the practice of remembering what Jesus did. Here at South Gate we take communion, the Lord’s Supper the first Sunday of every month.

#4 – Devoted to Prayer.

Prayer is communication and conversation with God. Here at South Gate, we pray individually, together in service, at our prayer house, intercessory prayer on Saturday's and more. The local church is required to teach, lead, and equip the saints in prayer.

#5 – Devoted to the Care of the Flock.

The first church in Acts even sold their possession to give to one another in need. If you are stalking us online to see if this is the church for you, you found a great sermon to listen to. I will tell you that you will feel loved at South Gate. This people know how to care for each other. You will find prayer and intercessor warriors in this church.

#6 – Devoted to Supernatural Ministry.

We cannot forget that in all the description of the church in Acts 2, signs, wonders, and miracles took place. I believe that the church today should walk in the same power and the same miracles as the first church. I don't see a single verse in the Bible that commands us in the New Testament to stop praying for the sick, casting out devils, and walking in miracles.

Ok, you all have been so good. You made it through my lecture today. I want to close with the word I feel the Lord has given to South Gate for 2026. I am committing and devoting myself to going after this in 2026. Before I release the word let me say this. This is more family business than sermon time so bear with me. Next week I am going into my final four classes in my doctorate program. I am attempting to earn a Doctor of Ministry degree in Church Revitalization. I will be submitting my decertation topic (about 150-page paper) to the board at the university soon. I am hoping I get to write on my desired topic which is "Transitioning a consumer driven congregation into a presence-driven missional house of God." Every second in school is going to be devoted to researching and writing on this subject and I am so excited. It will force me academically to give a practical answer to the word God has given our church. Here is the word for 2026:

Word for 2026:

The Year of Expansion. (Kingdom of God and Souls)

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” – Matthew 28:19-20

I believe this year the Lord will be bringing us people to disciple but also challenge us in the area of evangelism. My prayer and my goal this year is to provide a clear pathway for our culture here to witness to the Lord and bring souls into the kingdom. I don't know what that will look like so I welcome you to pray with me as we seek the Lord's guidance in obeying His leading.